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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4375
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1649
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 000312

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR AND INL
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [BB](#) [CO](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: RSS C-26 AIRCRAFT AND COLOMBIA

REF: A. STATE 10939

[1](#)B. BRIDGETOWN 189

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Per ref A, Ambassador Ourisman informed Barbados' Prime Minister Owen Arthur that INL's proposal to repair the two C-26 aircraft of the Regional Security System (RSS) airwing was no longer offered.

[1](#)2. (C) In response, PM Arthur and other officials noted that, in principle, Barbados was not opposed to cooperating with the United States in regional drug interdiction efforts. However, Barbadian officials were concerned that Barbados and the RSS member states could open themselves to charges of encroaching on Colombia's sovereignty, in the absence of a clear agreement by the government of Colombia to such operations. PM Arthur suggested that Barbados would consider this type of security cooperation in the future, if the United States, Barbados, and Colombia negotiated a trilateral agreement. However, Barbados would not be able to make any commitments regarding the C-26 aircraft in the near future, since both aircraft are expected to support Barbados and the region during the March-April Cricket World Cup (CWC).

[1](#)3. (C) PM Arthur confirmed that the governments of Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago shared the costs of repair and refurbishment of the two C-26s, as the other RSS member states could not afford the expense.

[1](#)4. (C) The government of Barbados, on behalf of the RSS, expressed appreciation for clarification that the government of Barbados was the owner of the two C-26s. PM Arthur subsequently publicly thanked the United States for its generosity in donating the two planes to the government of Barbados as a result of the Bridgetown Accord of 1997. PM Arthur confirmed the RSS airwing used the planes for counter-narcotics operations under the direction of JIATF South and for search and rescue operations. He also stated that they would support regional security surveillance for CWC.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: In a recent meeting with Ambassador Ourisman, PM Arthur described the RSS as an organization that is weak, underfunded, and suffering from its members' lack of commitment. Barbados has been funding the vast majority of the RSS budget, and it is likely that under these conditions, PM Arthur did not want to make any commitments on behalf of the RSS. Now that the ownership of the C-26 aircraft has been clarified, he may feel that he has greater latitude in

cooperating with the United States on security matters. As reported in ref B, PM Arthur has expressed an interest in pursuing a dialogue on U.S.-Barbadian security interests.

16. (C) PM Arthur may also welcome an increased engagement by Colombia in the Caribbean. PM Arthur has been skeptical of Venezuela's growing influence in the region, successfully avoiding entanglement in Venezuela's petrodollar net. He may view Colombia, a regional power geographically close to the Eastern Caribbean, as a useful counterweight to Venezuela. We should respond positively to PM Arthur's request for a security-focused dialogue, and if appropriate, renew our offer for greater cooperation in the counter-narcotics fight.

End Comment.
OURISMAN